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To joy a stranger, a wayworn ranger,
In every danger my course I've run;
Now joys all ending, and Death befriending,
His last aid lending, my life is done.
No more a rover nor hapless lover,
My days are over, my glass runs low:
Then for that reason, and for a season,
Let us be merry before we go.

In this song there is no audience in view and no exaltation is sought. The poem has intensity, and through the lines comes something of the secret of a life.

Padraic Colum

REVIEWS

FROST AND MASTERS

Mountain Interval, by Robert Frost. Henry Holt & Co.
The Great Valley, by Edgar Lee Masters. Macmillan Co.

In Kipling's story of primitive men the bard becomes a thing of awe because he can "tell the tale of the tribe," can save the tribe from engulfing oblivion by "making words run up and down in men's hearts"—words that move too grandly to be forgotten. In the final accounting perhaps this is the first function of the bard, even more his office than the setting of dreams to magic measures.

These two poets, Frost and Masters, are telling the tale of the tribe, the varying tales of their separate tribes; and the simultaneous appearance of their latest books tempts one to comparison and contrast. Reading the two books as a whole, without stopping for details, one gets an overpowering impression, not only of two different individuals

but of two different crowds. In Frost Puritan New England speaks with a voice as absolute as New Hampshire's granite hills. Whittier wandered there once, singing a few songs, and Emerson from those slopes looked inward and outward for truth. But neither of these felt New England as Frost feels it.

In the same way Masters tells the tale of his tribe. We have had—we have now—other poets of the Middle West. Whitman of course included this vast pioneer-peopled plain in his sublimated vision of These States as a cosmic democracy. Riley and Eugene Field—both town-lovers hardly aware of Mother Earth—delighted in, and to a certain extent individualized, the traditional rural types of this region, types handed down from Mark Twain, Bill Nye and other great humorists. Vachel Lindsay loves the Middle West like a big brother, pleads with it, sings of and to it, glorifies it with troubadour poems, making it picturesque, weaving a glamour around it. And Carl Sandburg loves Chicago and its sea-hearted lake, knows it intimately, as a cosmopolis. But perhaps none of these has got this particular region into his blood and bones so deeply as Mr. Masters, who was "raised" in one of its typical villages and who lives in its typical great city.

"Yankees are what they always were," sings Mr. Frost. His New England is the same old New England of the pilgrim fathers—a harsh, austere, velvet-coated-granite earth, bringing forth rigid, narrow, heroic men and women, hard but with unexpected softnesses. Their religion has been

modified since Cotton Mather, but not their character, at least not the character of those who stay on their farms, resisting the call of the West and the lure of towns. To present this earth, these people, the poet employs usually a blank verse as massive as they, as stript of all apologies and adornments. His poetry is sparing, austere, even a bit crabbéd at times; but now and then it lights up with a sudden and intimate beauty, a beauty springing from life-long love and intuition, as in these images of trees from two different poems:

> A resurrected tree,
> A tree that had been down and raised again,
> A barkless spectre—he had halted too,
> As if for fear of treading upon me.
> . . . . . .
>
> She had no saying dark enough
> For the dark pine that kept
> Forever trying the window-latch
> Of the room where they slept.

Nature is always thus an integral part of Mr. Frost's human dramas—not a mere background but one of the cast. It is wonderful how he builds up the terrific winter tempest in *Snow,* for example, and does it, not by mere statement, but through the talk of those delicately contrasted characters, the dry skeptical wife, the slower matter-of-fact husband, and the deep-breathing, deep-dreaming evangelist, lover of life and the storm. And "a springtime passion for the earth," with human life—yes, and brute life—as a part of it, burns in such poems as *In the Home Stretch, Putting in the Seed, Birches,* and *The Cow in Apple Time.*

It is appropriate, no doubt, that Masters should be less selective than Frost—the West is less reserved than New England. Against Frost's one hundred pages we have nearly three hundred from Masters, and *The Great Valley* is his second book of this year. The watchful critic must regret much of it; especially he must wonder, to the extreme of amazement, why the poet should have reverted to *Marsyas* and *Apollo at Pherae,* which are in the mood of those early books whose academic unexpressiveness will always be one of the curiosities of literature. But one must take a poet as he is, and this poet has to pour out whatever is in his heart, and leave his readers, or Father Time, to do the sifting. He has to do this, moreover in a spirit of careless abundance which throws off magic lines in a mass of coarser texture—flowers, grasses and weeds together under a brilliant and generous procreative sun.

But this is the prairie's exuberant way—one must look at this poet, not in close detail, but in the mass. Thus one may get from him, as from the prairies themselves, a sense of space and richness. One feels in him too the idealistic vision of a man accustomed to far horizons—that impatience with things near, things more or less faithless to the imminent beauty, and that relief in the contemplation of things remote, beauty's survivals or prophecies.

This chaotic half-baked civilization, growing up out of these broad and fruitful plains into dull little towns and mad great cities, all fitfully, inadequately spiritualized—this one feels in Mr. Masters' books. One feels also a deep

and tragic love of it, a thwarted but rooted faith in it, which cannot be destroyed by all the messy materialism, the soul-wasting "efficiency," which he sees around him. His "great valley" is dominated by the gigantic sombre figure of Lincoln, the Autochthon of his dream—Lincoln, who ever renews his power in the imagination of the people, growing greater, like the elder Titans, through the mists of time.

How much of all this Mr. Masters presents with adequate poetic magic no critic can define as yet. We, his neighbors and contemporaries, find—most of us—the very essence of it in *Spoon River,* which will surely tell something of the tale of our tribe to those who come after us. We find something of its atmosphere also, its light and shade and space, in the longer monologues of the later books, though here the theme is more consciously and as a rule less creatively presented. But in all one is carried along by a wave of power—the cumulative effect, like a geometrical progression, seems out of proportion to the separate steps that make it. This is the reader's tribute, no doubt, to the poet's rich and generous personality—that of a deeply informed man of the modern world, something between Chaucer and Rabelais, but burning darkly in his heart a little secret candle to some mediaeval saint.

One can not leave Mr. Masters without protesting against the new edition of *Spoon River,* now unfortunately the only one on sale. The so-called "illustrations" by Oliver Herford are pitiful beyond words. So embellished, the book looks like the typical ornamental volume on Reuben's parlor table.

To return to our parallel—it is important that two rich districts of this country, each an individual and powerful personality, are finding modern interpreters. Who will speak as well for the South, and for the Far West between sea and mountains? *H. M.*

A DECORATIVE COLORIST

Men, Women and Ghosts, by Amy Lowell. Macmillan Co.

In this book the dramatic monologues in the section called *The Overgrown Pasture* are perhaps the most keenly alive of the stories in various forms which compose it. Their free-verse presentation of the harsh Yankee dialect, and of the hard, stript Yankee character, is poetry as crabbéd as a barbed-wire fence, but it attains at times a certain tragic dignity by expressing with fit harshness the psychology of lonely New England rural women hurt to the point of madness or violence by solitude, silence, lack of sympathy and love. It is a generation gone to seed which she gives us here, an "overgrown pasture" which the hardy souls have deserted, and in which only ghosts, thwarted and wistful of life, remain.

The rest of the book might be called *Decorations,* for it is essentially a series—or, rather, several series—of decorative paintings. As becomes an artist in that kind, Miss Lowell has a really vital sense of color; and she keeps her planes intact, and holds her vivid tones to the key and the pattern. The only trouble is, she is tempted to become too much involved with her decorative scheme. Her form, whether it be rhythm royal or polyphonic prose, is in danger